

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of September 10, 2019

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth W. Goslant, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Lawton Rutter (Northfield Ambulance Chief), Mitch Osiecki (Zoning Administrator), Diane Scolaro (Norwich University), Douglas Osborne (Milone & MacBroom, Inc.), Michele Braun (Friends of the Winooski), Jeffrey Ott, Dave Hanna, Bonnie Hanna, Colleen Kottenbach, Chris Alger, Alana Alger, Gary Davis, Steve Davis, Kelli Cheney, Dan Sivori, James Buck, Greg Sanders, Mark Fournier, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. INFORMATIONAL HEARING

- a. Special Town Meeting Australian Ballot Article (Bond Authorization for Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project).** Chair Maxwell noted a Special Town Meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 17, 2019 and the one article on the warning reads as follows: "Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Northfield in an amount not to exceed One Million Seven Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,700,000), subject to reduction from the receipt of available state and federal grants-in-aid, and other financial assistance, be issued for the purpose of financing reconstruction of Union Brook Road, at an estimated cost of One Million Seven Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,700,000)?" Voting on this article will be held at the Northfield Middle/High School from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Early and/or absentee balloting also is available through the Town Clerk's Office. This hearing is being held so that members of the public can comment or ask questions on this matter. Board member Miller said if the bond vote is successful, the municipality will take out a twenty (20) year bond to finance the complete reconstruction of Union Brook Road. The floor was then opened to any member of the public who would like to speak.

Chris Alger is a former longtime employee of the Northfield Highway Department and he first thanked Board member Miller for his insightful recent posting on this matter on Front Porch Forum (FPF). Mr. Alger would like to be sure that there would be good post-reconstruction maintenance of this road so the large sums spent on it wouldn't be wasted. Board member Miller said if the bond vote is successful, funds would be set aside for future maintenance and this would be discussed when the Select Board members hold their initial FY 2020/2021 budget meetings in a couple months. He felt sufficient funds would be set aside in future budgets to stay on top of this. Mr. Alger asked if all the culverts on the road would have to be replaced. Manager Schulz said the culverts were inspected recently and found to be either undersized or in poor condition. He felt the construction phase of this project would be the best time to address this problem. Mr. Alger asked if the Highway Department crew could work on some aspects of the project to save money. Manager Schulz said it was possible the crew could help out with ditching and culvert replacement work. However, given the large scope of the project and the amount of time the crew members would have to spend away from their regular duties, it probably would be best to leave this work to the contractors.

Don Sivori noted in Board member Miller's FPF posting that the expense of fixing the "big dip" in this road would not be covered by the bond amount. He asked how much it would cost to fix this. Board member Miller said the current estimate is about \$55,000. Mr. Sivori has heard Manager Schulz and the Select Board members state that this is a good time to take on new debt as a number of old debts will be coming off the books in the next few years. He asked if the new debt payments will equal the amount of debt being retired. Chair Maxwell then referred to page 82 in the 2019 Northfield Town Report, which indicates that total debt payments were \$252,720 in FY 2018/2019 and this will decrease in subsequent fiscal years to \$230,000, \$204,570, \$137,620, \$103,420, and down to \$100,260 by FY 2023/2024. Since Manager Schulz estimates the average annual payments for the Union Brook Road bond note would be about \$130,000, there should be a rough balance in a couple years.

Mr. Sivori asked how long the reconstructed road would last before another round of extensive renovations is needed. Manager Schulz said the best estimate available is about twenty (20) years. That assumes no major weather events like Tropical Storm Irene, etc. Mr. Sivori asked how much it would cost each year to maintain the reconstructed road. Manager Schulz said that figure would have to be worked out in the budget meetings. Board member Miller said the amount probably would be about the same as what is currently set aside for Union Brook Road maintenance. Chair Maxwell noted the budget for the current fiscal year includes a large increase in the road gravel line item as the Select Board members take seriously their responsibility to properly maintain the backroads.

James Buck asked how the municipal tax rate would be affected should this bond vote pass. Chair Maxwell estimated an increase of about four cents (4¢) on the tax rate. However, this increase could be offset by savings in other parts of the municipal budget. Mr. Buck said this was useful information as voters would like to know how much this bond could personally cost them. Gary Davis asked what would be the property tax increase on a parcel assessed at \$200,000. The increase was calculated at about eighty dollars (\$80.00).

Mark Fournier has attended numerous Select Board meetings over the past few years to express his concerns about the condition of Union Brook Road. He said voters should understand the positive impact for the whole community of having good roads in Northfield. He felt the poor condition of some of the backroads has resulted in the undervaluation of several properties as well as limiting the number of new structures. Mr. Fournier noted Northfield residents have a history of supporting infrastructure projects that might not directly benefit them, such as municipal water and/or sewer projects, sidewalk rehabilitation, etc. He felt Union Brook Road needs to be fixed properly so that additional tax dollars won't be wasted on Band-Aid solutions.

Kelli Cheney asked if any other major projects are anticipated at this time that might further increase the municipal bond debt load. Chair Maxwell said none were planned at this time. However, no one can predict too far into the future.

Mr. Sivori would like an independent engineer assigned to the project so there is proper oversight of the road contractor. He would like to ensure that all phases of the project are done properly with no time or money wasted. Chair Maxwell said that has been the standard practice here for projects of this size.

Dave Hanna has a house that is close the Union Brook Road and he is concerned that the structure might be adversely affected by a major construction project. He would like the contractor to keep in contact with him to minimize any impact. Manager Schulz said that should be no problem.

Mr. Alger has received a copy of the current RSMS (Road Surface Management System) plan and would like to know when it would be a good time to discuss it. Manager Schulz said the best time would be during the budget meetings when the Highway budget for the next fiscal year is developed. Board member Miller noted the plan is being revised by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) based on suggestions from him and the Highway Subcommittee that the data should be reconfigured to take current road conditions into account when setting road maintenance priorities.

There being no additional questions or comments, the Informational Hearing closed at 7:47 p.m. The Select Board regular meeting followed immediately.

IV. SET/ADJUST AGENDA. Manager Schulz said Recreation Committee Chair Sally Davidson was scheduled to provide an update on her committee's recent activities but had to postpone this report until the Select Board's next regular meeting (09/24/19).

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

- a. **Diane Scolaro, Norwich University Associate VP: Norwich University's Bicentennial Homecoming (09/18/19-09/22/19).** Ms. Scolaro has addressed the Select Board members twice before to explain how Norwich University (NU) will be preparing for the large influx of alumni and other visitors for this special Homecoming Weekend. Although there will be scheduled events from Wednesday afternoon through Sunday morning, the bulk of activities will be held on Friday and Saturday.

Ms. Scolaro said NU usually has about 1,200 alumni and family members pre-register for homecoming events with expected attendance between 2,500 and 3,000. They now have about 4,000 individuals pre-registered for this year's events so it is reasonable to assume visitors in the 8,000 to 10,000 range. Ms. Scolaro believes NU has made all necessary preparations for the traffic expected and she thanked the municipality for all its assistance with this. The NU administration is well aware of the significant impact this influx will have on the Northfield community and has taken all the steps needed to lessen problems with traffic, parking, etc. In addition to the one thousand (1,000) on-campus parking spaces, satellite parking lots have been designated at Cabot Hosiery, the former Bean Chevrolet lot, the Fernandez Field, etc. with shuttle bus service to and from campus. As for traffic control, Ms. Scolaro said off-duty Washington County Sheriffs have been engaged along with a private traffic control agency. In case of any medical emergencies, a Northfield Ambulance Service unit will be stationed on campus over the weekend. Ms. Scolaro said NU students and local volunteers also will assist and direct the visitors attending the various events and activities. Signage will be installed that will encourage visitors to enjoy Northfield and its various attractions while here. She added the NU administration is open to any suggestions in the next week on how this celebration could run better. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members certainly appreciate all that has been done to date and the fact NU has kept the municipality fully in the loop throughout the process. He sincerely hopes that the Bicentennial Homecoming Weekend will be a complete success for all involved.

- b. Michele Braun, Executive Director, Friends of the Winooski and Douglas Osborne, Water Resource Engineer, Milone & MacBroom, Inc.: Bull Run Dam Removal Project.** Ms. Braun had addressed the Select Board members about a year ago (10/09/18) regarding grant funds the Friends of the Winooski (FOW) received to remove dilapidated dams throughout Vermont. The local dam on Bull Run Brook near Camp Wihakowi was identified as one of the worst. It was installed in the 1920s to create a resort swimming area but has been abandoned for decades. The dam was allowed to deteriorate and the former swimming area as become clogged with knotweed. There now is an increasing threat of a total dam collapse that might take out an adjacent bridge and damage several nearby properties. As there will be no direct cost to the municipality, the Select Board members encouraged the project then and pledged any assistance. Ms. Braun said the project design is now complete and the Act 250 permit process is underway. Mr. Osborne from the engineering firm Milone and MacBroom is here tonight to explain the decisions the municipality will need to make to facilitate the permitting process. For example, during the dam removal process about 26,000 cubic yards of sediment will have to be removed from the river to restore the natural water flow. Two thousand (2,000) cubic yards will be retained by the property owners and another ten thousand (10,000) will be used to bury off-site the removed knotweed. That leaves about fourteen thousand (14,000) cubic yards of sediment. At the previous meeting, the Select Board members indicated interest in retaining and reusing the sediment as road material. Ms. Braun wanted to know if this still was the case as the destination of the removed sediment has to be specified on the permit forms. She added if the remaining sediment is left in Northfield, this would reduce the overall project costs.

As at the previous meeting, Board member Goslant has concerns that the access bridge to the site may not be sturdy enough to handle the many heavy truckloads of knotweed and sediment leaving the area. Manager Schulz noted the bridge is rated at 50,000 pounds, which should be sufficient. The project engineer will confirm this with a survey before any material is transported. Board member Goslant asked if municipal vehicles would be used in the project. Ms. Braun said that would be the Select Board's decision. Manager Schulz said he didn't envision the Highway Department getting directly involved in this project due to the time and effort it would incur. Board member Goslant still wants to be sure this project doesn't have a detrimental impact on the bridge.

Board member Miller doesn't consider it feasible for the municipality to retain the removed sediment as there is no way to determine beforehand how much of the available 14,000 cubic yards would be suitable as road material. With the added expense of hauling the sediment, screening it, sorting it, etc., he felt recycling the material might not be cost-effective. Board member Miller would like it taken elsewhere. Board member Goslant would like the possibility at least explored further.

Board member Goodrich shares Board member Miller's concerns that any savings realized by recycling the sediment could be cancelled out by the extra expense of transportation, storage, etc. Manager Schulz has spoken to Highway Foreman Trent Tucker about this material and Mr. Tucker said some of it could be used to shore up some nearby sections of Bull Run Road. This matter will be discussed further as the permitting process continues. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Braun and Mr. Osborne for their efforts to date and the update provided tonight.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **August 27, 2019 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #05-20.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve Warrant #05-20 in the amount of \$1,614,260.58. Board member Goodrich asked about an invoice for street sweeping done in June. Manager Schulz said the contracted street sweeper broke down at that time and the contractor chose not to bill the municipality until the work was completed. This invoice doesn't include the work recently done right before the Labor Day holiday weekend. Board member Goodrich noted a \$500 water bill for one month's operation of the fountain on the Common. Manager Schulz said he and Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi have looked at a number of alternatives, such as recycling the water, but none have been considered cost-effective. Now that the Labor Day celebration has passed, Board member Goodrich suggested turning off the fountain until next spring. Board member Goodrich noted of the total warrant amount, about \$1,100,000 represented property tax money collected by the municipality and forwarded to the Paine Mountain School District. Manager Schulz added that an additional \$300,000 was spent purchasing power for the Northfield Electric Department. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through August 25, 2019.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$84,164.92. Board member Goodrich noted an increase in Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime expense. Manager Schulz said this was mainly due to NPD officers taking summer vacation time. There also were officers taking maternity leave and bereavement time. He noted this payroll period did not include the NPD overtime incurred over the Labor Day weekend. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Northfield Ambulance Fee Schedule.** Manager Schulz said Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) Chief Lawton Rutter has been working on revising the NAS fee schedule for several months. The intent is to better match department revenue to expenses and stay competitive with the fees charged by other ambulance services in the region. He added the rates haven't been changed for about three (3) years and the increases are pretty much across the board. Chief Rutter confirmed this and also noted new fees for non-transport calls. For example, one persistent issue was the number of times the NAS crew were called out to local homes to help lift bed-ridden residents (AKA "Repetitive Lift Assist"). In the past, NAS was unable to bill to cover the callout expense because this was not covered in the fee schedule. Chief Rutter noted the NAS crew was summoned to one residence fifteen (15) times in one month. The revised fee schedule would charge \$125 per callout (\$150 to non-residents), which should be covered by the patient's medical insurance. In addition, some local care facilities have made similar requests for repetitive lift assists as they have concerns about employee liability issues. In the revised fee schedule, these care facilities would be charged \$200 for an "Institutional Lift Assist." NAS also would institute a \$200 per callout charge (\$250 to non-residents) for when the NAS crew responds to an accident scene, treats the patient(s) on scene, but doesn't transport anyone to the hospital (AKA "Working Code No Transport." Chief Rutter said the new fee schedule would try to recoup NAS expenses that formerly fell upon the Northfield taxpayer.

Board member Goodrich asked if there were any formal guidelines on how much to charge for these “no-transport” callouts. Chief Rutter said there were not but he reached out to other area ambulance services to determine if they charged for these services and, if so, how much. He confirmed the individuals and institutions now receiving no-charge lift assists will be informed of the new fee schedule (if approved). Chair Maxwell would like Chief Rutter to draft a formal policy covering the topic of charging for no-transport callouts. Chief Rutter said he would develop one as soon as possible for the Select Board’s review. Board member Goslant asked if all non-billable callouts are documented. Chief Rutter confirmed every callout is fully documented and categorized whether or not any or all of the services provided are billable. Board member Goslant has observed the NAS units out in the community frequently and asked if the new fee structure is sufficient to cover such NAS expenses as labor, vehicle purchases, vehicle maintenance, medical supplies, etc. Chief Rutter said the proposed fee structure is sufficient to meet these expenses and is comparable to charges from other regional ambulance services. He felt it would be best to revisit this matter each year in order to keep the fee structure fully up to date. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the revised Northfield Ambulance Service fee schedule as proposed. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Vermont Better Connections Grant – Authorization to Award Contract.** Manager Schulz said the Northfield Recreation Trails Committee (Lydia Petty, Bonnie Donahue, Deborah Zuaro, etc.) applied for and received a grant from the Vermont Better Connections Program to “create a master plan to better connect Northfield’s villages to one another, Norwich University, and their recreational centers by enhancing the streetscape and improving connections to the Dog River.” The grant amount is \$88,333 with the total cost of the project projected at \$94,333. The Select Board already has authorized up to \$7,000 in “existing economic development funds” to cover the balance. A project RFP was solicited and proposals were received from the SE Group (AKA Stantec, Inc.) and DuBois & King. Both firms submitted the same project cost (\$94,333). The Recreation Trails Committee reviewed the bids and although both firms are well-qualified, the committee members recommended the SE Group since it was felt they could better meet the proposed project timeframe. Motion by Board member Miller, seconded by Board member Goslant, to authorize Manager Schulz to reach an agreement with the SE Group for the Vermont Better Connections grant project. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. BOARD MEMBERS’ COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Labor Day Weekend Festivities.** Board member Goslant wanted to thank everyone who contributed to make last week’s Labor Day Weekend Festivities such a success (despite rain on the parade). This includes Northfield Observances, Inc. (especially President Wendy Rea and Vice-President Matt Gadbois), the Northfield Rotary Club, Northfield Savings Bank, etc.
- b. Cross Brothers Dam Removal.** Given tonight’s presentation on the Bull Run Dam, Board member Goslant wanted to know the status of the plan to remove the Cross Brothers Dam on the Dog River. Manager Schulz said the group planning this are still trying to obtain sufficient funding. Board member Goslant hopes this work could be done in conjunction with the replacement of the nearby Main Street Bridge (see below).
- c. East Street Sidewalk Project.** Board member Goslant asked about the status of this project, which was hoped to be completed before the Labor Day holiday weekend. Manager Schulz said there had been a further delay when the paving contractor was pulled off the project in order to work on another job elsewhere. The project engineer was able to find a replacement paver and the work should be restarted later this week.

- d. **Cox Brook Road Paving Project.** Board member Doney asked about the timeline for paving this road now that the old asphalt has been removed. Manager Schulz reached out to the paving contractor and was informed the paving should be completed by the end of this month. Board member Doney would like the covered bridges on Cox Brook Road refurbished before visitors arrive for the NU Bicentennial Homecoming.
- e. **Water Street/Union Street Stormwater Project, etc.** Board member Goslant asked about the status of this project. Manager Schulz said the waterlines have been installed, the new curbing is in, and the new sidewalk will be installed next. This work will be completed before the end of the month. Pike Industries will be back to repave the affected sections of Water Street and Union Street sometime this fall. Board member Goslant then asked about the nearby Pleasant Street Bridge. Manager Schulz said the bridge deck will be re-planked after the paving on Union Street has been completed.
- f. **Stony Brook Road Bridge.** Board member Goslant noted the bridge still is in a bad condition and asked if anything is going to be done about this. Manager Schulz said the state grant application he submitted this past year was unsuccessful so he plans to apply again next spring. The Select Board should set some funds aside in the next budget for the grant's local match amount should this application be successful.

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Sidewalk Grant.** Manager Schulz stated Northfield was successful in receiving \$75,000 in state funds that will pay for half the cost of installing concrete sidewalk along the west side of South Main Street from Depot Square to the NU Plumley Armory. The Select Board will need to budget the remaining project costs when it develops the municipal budget for FY 2020/2021. The work should be started and completed next summer.
- b. **Main Street Bridge.** VTrans inspectors have identified this bridge as deficient and its planned replacement is high on its priority list. As part of the process, Manager Schulz filled out a questionnaire that included local information and how this project would affect vehicular and foot traffic while the bridge is out of commission. VTrans will determine the best way to divert traffic but this should not be a major problem as there are not too onerous options. Submitting this questionnaire is only the start of what should be a long process with public hearings, the development of bridge schematics, etc. Manager Schulz feels the construction phase will be at least four (4) years away.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Jason Buck: Road Grading.** Mr. Buck asked if there is a published schedule for future road grading. Manager Schulz said there is not but he could forward this information to Mr. Buck by email. Mr. Buck hopes to see the grader on Hallstrom Road in the near future. Manager Schulz will speak to Highway Foreman Trent Tucker about this.

XII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Goslant, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of September 24, 2019.